



The Qur'anists

Aisha Y. Musa*

Florida International University

Abstract

Stories relating the words and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad, known as Hadith in Arabic, have long been esteemed by the vast majority of Muslims as a source of law and guidance second only to the Qur'an in authority. In recent years, an increasingly vocal Muslim opposition to Hadith insists that the Qur'an alone should be the sole source of religious law and guidance in Islam. Rashad Khalifa, Kassim Ahmad, Edip Yuksel, and Ahmad Subhy Mansour are among the most important rejecters of the Hadith, whose arguments influence a wide variety of groups popularly labeled Ahl al-Qur'an, Qur'niyyun or Qur'anists.

Qur'anists: Contemporary Muslim Opposition to the Use and Authority of the Hadith

Hadith, stories of the words and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad are the second scriptural source of law and guidance after the Qur'an for most Muslims. They are the only vehicle through which, according to the majority of Muslims, we can access what Muhammad said and did and that of which he tacitly approved. These stories have played an important role in shaping the development of Islam as we know it today. Recently, however, an increasingly vocal Muslim opposition to the use and authority of the Hadith has emerged. Insistence on the Qur'an alone as the sole source of religious law and guidance in Islam has earned those who oppose the Hadith the epithet 'Qur'anists.' This article will introduce the most prominent trends and thinkers among the various groups referred to by this title.

There are two strains of opposition to the authority of the Hadith. The first is opposition to an extra-Qur'anic source of scriptural authority and the second is to the problematic content of some of the Hadith that make the religion an object of ridicule. Authenticity is also a concern, and opponents of the Hadith often argue that the Hadith have nothing to do with the Prophet. However, the overriding concern is about granting scriptural authority to something other than the Qur'an.

The number of groups and individuals who may be called 'Qur'anists' appears to be increasing. The Internet has opened the discussion to a broad array of participants and observers. At the time of this is being written, Wikipedia's entry entitled 'Qur'an alone' contains links to more than a dozen websites dedicated to interpreting Islam without using Hadith.

While some opponents of the Hadith express themselves openly, using their own names, others publish their views anonymously or under pseudonyms for fear of reprisals. Arrest, detention, and imprisonment of *Qur'anists* in Egypt has gained increasing attention in the Muslim world since at least early 2003, when the London based, Arabic language daily, *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, reported that eight Egyptians were sentenced by Egypt's Supreme State Security Court to terms ranging from 6 months to 3 years for 'contempt of religion'

for rejecting Prophetic Traditions, interpreting the Qur'an for themselves in ways differ dramatically from mainstream understanding of Islamic beliefs and practices (*al-Sharq al-Awsat* 2003). More arrests and detentions in 2007 sparked intense debated in the Egyptian press, and scholars of al-Azhar declared the *Qur'anists* apostates who are attempting to 'destroy Islam.' Former Deputy Rector of al-Azhar and member of the Islamic Studies Committee, Mahmoud Ashour, was quoted in *al-Sharq al-Awsat* as saying they are 'more dangerous to Islam than any other group.' (Khalil 2007). The situation of Egypt's *Qur'anists* illustrates the gravity of the issue for Muslims.

An important aspect of the modern debates over the Hadith is that they involve educated ordinary Muslims. In his 1999 article 'The Coming Transformation of the Muslim World,' Dale Eickelman discusses the effect that 'unprecedented access that ordinary people now have to information and knowledge about religion and other aspects of their society' is having on religious authority in the Muslim world:

What distinguishes the present era from prior ones is the large number of believers engaged in the 'reconstruction' of religion, community, and society. In an earlier era, political or religious leaders would prescribe, and others were supposed to follow. Today, the major impetus for change in religious and political values comes from below. (Eickelman 1999)

The contemporary challengers of the Hadith illustrate Eickelman's point – they are educated, ordinary Muslims rather than religious scholars or clergy. As Daniel Brown's analysis of the early 20th century *Qur'an alone* movements shows they made use of the popular press and self-published books and journals (Brown 1996). This continues today. The Internet has contributed to the spread and development of a variety of *Qur'anist* movements throughout the world. Besides the discussions in Egypt, opposition to the Hadith was and is taking place throughout the Muslim world, in countries such as Malaysia, Kuwait, and South Africa (Tolu-e-Islam 2009).

Among the leading opponents of the Hadith are Rashad Khalifa and Ahmad Subhy Mansour, Egyptians who settled in the United States, Kassim Ahmed of Malaysia, and Edip Yuksel, a Turkish religious activist who immigrated to the United States to escape persecution in his homeland. Their works are available both in traditional print media and on the Internet. Each of them was born and raised in a traditional Sunni family in a Muslim country. While some may have lived and studied in Western countries, they came to the West as adults with their respective cultural, social, ethnic, and religious backgrounds. They are not 'Westerners' who are seeking to 'Westernize' Islam to fit their 'Western' culture. This is significant because one of the most frequent criticisms of the modern-day opposition to the authoritative status of the Hadith is that it is an essentially Western-influenced assault on Islam (Hashim 2007).

Rashad Khalifa

The Qur'anic arguments leveled against the use of Hadith were most strongly articulated by Rashad Khalifa, in his 1982 book *Quran, Hadith, and Islam*. The book is less than 90 pages, but from beginning to end it is a vehement indictment of traditional Islam as idolatry that violates the teachings delivered by Muhammad.

Born in Egypt in 1935, Khalifa came to the United States in 1959, where he obtained a PhD in Biochemistry. He settled in the United States and was active in the local Muslim community. Dissatisfied with English translations of the Qur'an, Khalifa set out to do a translation of his own (Submission.org 2009). In working on the translation, he scrutinized the Arabic initials that preface certain chapters of the Qur'an. A computer analysis

of the text revealed numerical patterns related to the initials that according to Khalifa proved the divine origin of the Qur'an. This brought Khalifa popular acclaim throughout the Muslim world and even a congratulatory letter from the director of the Department of Research and Publications at al-Azhar University's Academy of Islamic Research (al-Fuqa 1976; Unpublished letter). Ahmed Deedat also promoted Khalifa's work in a booklet entitled *Al-Quran, the Ultimate Miracle* (Deedat 1986).

However, numerical patterns in the Qur'an were not the only discovery Khalifa claimed to have made. In the preface to *Quran, Hadith, and Islam* he writes:

The continued research unveiled a startling fact: that the extremely popular 'Hadith & Sunna' have nothing to do with the prophet Muhammad, and that the adherence thereto represents flagrant disobedience of God and His final prophet (Quran 6:112 & 25:31). This finding contradicts the beliefs of Muslim masses everywhere. Consequently, my personal popularity, and even the popularity of the Quran's miracle, plunged to the point of endangering my life and reputation. As it turned out, telling Muslims that 'Hadith and Sunna' are Satanic inventions is the same as telling Christians that Jesus is not the son of God (Khalifa 1982).

Khalifa's declaration that the Hadith and Sunna were 'Satanic inventions' angered Muslims around the world (Bayān min al-Azhar 1985). In the book prefaced by that bold declaration, Khalifa uses Qur'anic verses, a few Biblical verses, and even Hadith to support his conclusions. For those who accept his findings, he says, 'the results include a totally new sense of salvation, and full awareness that the Muslim masses have fallen victim to Satan's schemes' (Khalifa 1982).

Khalifa starts by establishing premises on which all Muslims agree: obeying the Messenger is obligatory and Messengers do not speak for themselves (Khalifa 1982, pp. 1–2). By identifying these premises and using them as a starting point, Khalifa anticipates the response most often made when the Hadith are challenged – the Qur'an commands obedience to the Messenger, which requires acceptance of the Hadith. Khalifa understands this and agrees with need to obey the Messenger. Where Khalifa differs with the majority of Muslims is on what obedience to the Messenger requires and what represents the teachings of the Messenger: 'Muhammad is represented by the Quran alone' (Khalifa 1982, p. 3). Khalifa cites more than 70 verses from the Qur'an, in both Arabic and English, to support a number of assertions, including:

- The Qur'an is 'complete, perfect, and fully detailed';
- Muhammad's only duty was to deliver the Qur'an;
- Muhammad was forbidden from explaining the Qur'an;
- Obeying the Messenger is following only the Qur'an;
- Religious practices came from Abraham, not Muhammad;
- 'Hadith' and 'Sunna' are '100% conjecture';
- The Qur'an is only 'Hadith' that Muslims should follow.

Khalifa (1982) cites many verses, but here I will only mention some key verses used. The translations are those of Khalifa, and these differ from more mainstream translators. The emphasis is also that of Khalifa. Among the verses used to support his assertion that the Qur'an is complete and fully detailed are 6:38–39: 'We did not leave anything out of this book...' (Khalifa 1982, p. 10). He then cites portions of 6:114–115: 'Shall I seek other than God as a source of law, when He revealed *this Book to you fully detailed*...The word of your Lord is *complete* in truth & justice' (p. 10). Khalifa challenges Muslims by citing these verses under the heading, 'Do you believe God or not?' (p. 10).

The challenge is directed toward those who argue that the Hadith are a necessary complement to the Qur'an. How can a 'complete' book require a 'complement'? The none-too-subtle suggestion is that no one who believes such a thing believes God. One who does not believe God is a disbeliever. As he did in his preface, Khalifa harshly condemns the vast majority of Muslims. This too is a very serious charge and one that angers many Muslims.

One of the strongest arguments for Hadith has to do with the details of religious practices. Khalifa understands this. He says 'their favorite question' is 'If the Quran is complete (as God says), where do we find the details of Salat [*sic*] prayers?' Khalifa's parenthetical insertion is yet another none-too-subtle implication: those who ask this question do not believe what God says. He further states that the question 'reveals their total ignorance of the Quran' (Khalifa 1982, p. 37). Khalifa's response to 'their favorite question' is that all religious practices come to us from Abraham, in support of which he cites Qur'an 22:78:

He has blessed you and imposed no hardship in your religion; the *religion of your father Abraham*. Abraham is the one who named you 'Muslims' in the beginning... Therefore you shall observe the Salat prayers, give the Zakat charity... (Khalifa 1982, p. 38)

To show that the specific religious practices mentioned in 22:78 were given to Abraham, Khalifa emphasizes part of 21:72–73: '*and We taught them righteous works and the observance of Salat and Zakat*'. (Khalifa 1982, p. 48). He offers similar verses regarding fasting and the Hajj to show that they too were known and practiced since the time of Abraham (Khalifa 1982, pp. 49–50), and Muhammad was to follow the religion of Abraham (Khalifa 1982, p. 40). Muhammad's contribution to Islam was not the details of religious practices, as these were already known. They are Abraham's contribution to Muslims' religious lives. Muhammad's contribution was the delivery of the Qur'an. Pointing out the Qur'an's use of the Arabic construction *ma...illa*, which he refers to as a 'double negative' used for emphasis, Khalifa cites the Qur'an 42:48 and 5:99 in support of the idea that Muhammad had '*no duty except delivering (Quran)*' (Khalifa 1982, p. 32).

Another popular argument for Hadith that Khalifa attacks is that Muhammad explained things beyond the details of religious practices. He declares emphatically that Muhammad was forbidden to explain the Qur'an, citing 75:17–19: 'It is we who will put it together as a Quran. Once we reveal it, *you shall follow it*. Then, it is we who will explain it' (Khalifa 1982, p. 69).

What Khalifa offers is radical redefinition of the role of the Messenger as the majority of Muslims understand it. He even uses Hadith from the collections of al-Bukhari and Muslim in which Muhammad prohibited writing anything from him except the Qur'an as evidence that the advocates of Hadith do not even follow their own teachings (Khalifa 1982, p. 34). However, he does not stop there. He also attacks the idea that Prophetic Hadith are a form divine inspiration.

Here too, Qur'anic verses are Khalifa's weapon of choice, especially verses that use the Arabic word *Hadith*, such as: "These are God's verses; we recite them for you truthfully. In which '*Hadith*', [*sic*] beside God and His verses do they believe in [*sic*]?" (Khalifa 1982, p. 57). To further emphasize his point that the "Quran is the only '*Hadith*' to be followed," and that 'all other *Hadiths* are blasphemous and misleading fabrications,' Khalifa follows his citation of Qur'an 45:6 with 39:23 and 31:6–7, which also contain the Arabic word *Hadith*: "God has revealed the best '*Hadith*'; [*sic*] a book...;" and "[t]here are those who advocate vain '*Hadith*' causing diversion from the path of God, without knowledge, and fail to take such actions seriously..." (Khalifa 1982, p. 58).

For Khalifa, there is no middle ground. There is no question of 'authentic' or 'inauthentic' Hadith. For Khalifa, the crucial question is posed in 45:6. Khalifa sees anyone who follows any Hadith 'after God and His verses' as being described in 31:6. They are 'idol worshippers' of Muhammad who are unaware of their idolatry and consider themselves righteous (Khalifa 1982, 53–4). The importance of Hadith and Sunna for Khalifa is that they are a 'necessary test to distinguish the true Muslim from the false Muslim' (Khalifa 1982, p. 55).

It is not surprising that Muslims worldwide reacted with anger and hostility. However, not all Muslims had this reaction. Some were moved by the Qur'anic arguments he presented. One such Muslim is Kassim Ahmad, author of *Hadith: a Re-evaluation* (Ahmad 1997).

Kassim Ahmad

Born and raised in Malaysia in a traditional Sunni family, Ahmad (1997) says that he held the generally accepted Sunni beliefs, tempered by Ibn Khaldūn's criteria of checking traditions against the Qur'an and rational thinking, until he encountered Khalifa's work in 1985. Khalifa 'opened for [him] a way to solve the problem of the Hadith' (Ahmad 1997, p. 3). The problem to which Ahmad refers is 'their negative effects on the Muslim community' and their connection to the decline and fall of the Muslims. Because of their negative effects, Ahmad believes Muslims need to completely 're-evaluate the whole heritage of traditional Islamic thought' (Ahmad 1997, pp. 2–3). Ahmad is not alone in calling for such a re-evaluation. Many Muslims have worked to reform Islam and Muslim thinking, including Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Muhammad 'Abduh, and Rashid Rida. In spite of the efforts of such reformers, Ahmad says, 'the condition of the Muslim community has not changed much and continues to be precarious.' The question that Muslims must ask themselves is 'why?' Ahmad recognizes that many social, cultural, political, historic, economic and other factors play a role, but not all factors play an equal role. Ahmad sees ideology as the most important factor (Ahmad 1997, pp. 5–6). He identifies what he sees as the basis for the failure of the modern reform movement begun by Muhammad, Abduh:

His basic references are still the Quran *and* the Hadith. I have pointed out that herein lies the failure of this movement. The Hadith, and everything else, have to be judged by the Quran. (Ahmad 1997, p. ix)

Ahmad's hypothesis is that the early Muslims were successful when the Qur'an was their sole source of religious guidance and that Muslim society only declined after they granted Hadith authority along with the Qur'an:

After about three hundred years, extraneous harmful teachings not taught by Prophet Muhammad but skillfully attributed to him gradually gained a foothold in the Muslim community and turned them away from the dynamic invincible ideology that initially brought them success. (Ahmad 1997, p. 8)

Although, he identifies the use of Hadith along with Qur'an as the reason for the decline and stagnation of Muslim society and calls for a complete re-evaluation of Islam's intellectual heritage to remedy the problem of the Hadith, unlike Khalifa, Ahmad makes it clear that such a re-evaluation is not an attack against classical scholars. It is 'a normal scientific procedure,' in which all 'great [Muslim] philosophers and scholars' engaged (Ahmad 1997, p. 17).

Ahmad then addresses what he calls 'the Traditionists' theory' of the Hadith. He divides this into four arguments that he addresses one-by-one (Ahmad 1997, pp. 23–49).

- Sunna is revelation;
- 'Obey the Messenger' means 'Uphold the Hadith';
- Hadith Interprets Qur'an;
- The Example of the Prophet.

Ahmad begins with the idea that the 'wisdom' referred to in the Qur'an refers to extra-Qur'anic revelations given to Muhammad. Ahmad's starting premise is that the Qur'an explains itself. In looking at the twenty occurrences of the word *hikma* (wisdom) in the Qur'an, he concludes that 'it is obvious that it refers to the teachings of the Quran, or to general wisdom that all prophet-messengers or moral teachers were endowed with' (Ahmad 1997, p. 24). Among the verses he cites to show that the 'wisdom' is to be found in the teachings of the Qur'an is 17:39: '*This is part of the wisdom that your Lord reveals to you*, where the word 'wisdom' refers to some 13 ethical teachings enumerated in verses 22 to 38' (Ahmad 1997, pp. 23–4). Among the verses he cites to show that the 'wisdom' is something with which all prophets, messengers or moral teachers were endowed are 3:81, which states that God has given all the prophets 'the Book and wisdom,' and 31:12, which states that God granted wisdom to Luqman. Along with verses that contain the word *hikma*, Ahmad cites verses that describe the Qur'an as *hakim*, to support the idea that the 'wisdom' that God gave to Muhammad refers to the teachings of the Qur'an and not to any extra-Qur'anic revelation. The wise leadership that Muhammad demonstrated was 'consequent upon his acting strictly in accordance with the ethical teachings of the Quran' (Ahmad 1997, p. 25).

After examining Qur'anic usage of the word *hikma*, Ahmad examines the usages of *Sunna* and *Hadith*. He shows two different usages of *Sunna*, the first is for God's system (*Sunna*) mentioned in 48:23, and the second is for 'the example of the fate suffered by ancient communities,' mentioned in 8:38. 'None,' he says, 'refers to the behavior of the Prophet.' In discussing the Qur'anic usage of the word *Hadith*, Ahmad cites the same verses Khalifa used and concludes that the Qur'anic usage 'categorically rejects any Hadith besides the Quran' (Ahmad 1997, pp. 26–7).

Addressing the second Traditionist argument that links obeying the Messenger to following Hadith, Ahmad argues that 'the messenger is not an independent agency [*sic*],' but the 'agency [*sic*] that delivered the message' (Ahmad 1997, p. 31). Ahmad then mentions those verses that indicate that the messenger's only function is to deliver the message. In keeping with the principle that the Qur'an explains itself, Ahmad points out that all verses that mention obedience to the Messenger do so only in connection with obedience to God (Ahmad 1997, p. 32).

Having addressed the issues of the *Sunna* as a form of divine revelation and obedience to the Messenger, Ahmad takes up the idea that Muhammad explained the Qur'an. Here too, he presents the same verses used by Khalifa, but uses milder tone. Like Khalifa, Ahmad argues that prayer, charity, fasting, and pilgrimage have been inherited from Abraham. He adds that even so, the Qur'an mentions the main features of these practices and that people learn these practices from parents and teachers, not from Hadith (Ahmad 1997, p. 36).

Ahmad then responds to the final argument of what he calls the Traditionists' theory – that when the Qur'an calls the Messenger 'a good example' in 33:21, it means his

behavior must be imitated as closely as possible in all things and this requires Hadith – in the same way he responded to the previous arguments, offering other verses from the Qur'an to explain the meaning key terms. To explain the meaning of 'good example' (*uswa hasana*) in 33:21, Ahmad argues that the same words are used to describe Abraham and those who believed with him in 60:4:

A good example has been set for you by Abraham and those with him. They said to their people, 'We disown you and the idols you set up besides God...' (Ahmad 1997, pp. 38–9)

According to Ahmad, this verse shows that the good example refers to 'one's religious convictions, ideological position and struggle' (Ahmad 1997, p. 39). He also argues that it is unreasonable to think that God would require Muslims to imitate Muhammad's personal behaviors such as eating and dressing because such behaviors are matters of culture, education, and personal preference (Ahmad 1997, p. 39).

After dealing with general arguments supporting the Hadith as a source of religious law and guidance, Ahmad presents his argument that the Qur'an is complete, perfect, and fully detailed. Again, he uses the same verses used by Khalifa and comes to the conclusion that the status of Hadith is a form of idolatry: 'To place the Hadith on an equivalent footing with revelation is to create another source of guidance – an idol. This is the major problem with the Hadith' (Ahmad 1997, p. 49). Ahmad, however, tempers his position, saying:

the theory or doctrine that the hadith is an equal source of guidance with the Quran, propounded by Shafi'i, is the most important aspect of the hadith question. Even though we totally reject this doctrine, we do not reject the hadith as a secondary source, provided that it does not contradict the Quran. On this view also, we say that the hadith is an important source of early Muslim social history. (Ahmad 1997, p. 49)

Ahmad's views on the Hadith, the nature of revelation, and the role of the Messenger, and the Qur'anic verses he uses to support those views are essentially the same as those presented by Khalifa, but his presentation differs dramatically. Not only does he use a much less strident and condemnatory tone, he also appeals to rational thinking, desires for social reform, and classical Muslim intellectual history to buffer and support his call for re-evaluation of the status of Hadith. Ahmad's more tempered presentation was not enough to keep his book from being banned in his home country of Malaysia, nor from his being declared a heretic. However, his style has not garnered the degree of hostility that Muslims have directed against Rashad Khalifa.

Edip Yuksel

Edip Yuksel, a friend and colleague of Rashad Khalifa, is another prominent figure among advocates of the doctrine of *Qur'an alone*. His works are published in traditional print media, and he also maintains various websites. He uses his own name and picture on his websites and publishes under his own name. Born and raised in Turkey, Yuksel also comes from a traditional Sunni background. Like Ahmad, Yuksel was introduced to the idea of following the *Qur'an alone* through the works of Khalifa. Before encountering Khalifa's work, Yuksel had been a political and religious activist in Turkey, where he advocated the establishment of a theocratic Islamic state. Khalifa's arguments brought about what Yuksel describes as a 'paradigm change' in his thinking. To escape the repercussions of his new way of thinking, Yuksel left Turkey for the United States in 1989 (Yuksel 2009b).

Although Yuksel came to believe that the Qur'an is the only legitimate source of religious guidance in Islam after exposure to Khalifa's work, Yuksel's writings show more independence than those of Ahmad. Like Khalifa and Ahmad, Yuksel rejects the Hadith using the same Qur'anic arguments. However, he differs with Khalifa in his interpretations of the Qur'an on certain issues, including the ritual prayer and the number of daily prayers. While Khalifa and Ahmad see these as inherited from Abraham and passed from generation to generation, Yuksel applies his own reasoning to the verses of the Qur'an that discuss *salat*. His study has led him to the conclusion that there are three, rather than five daily prayers required because only three *salat* are mentioned by name in the Qur'an. Yuksel finds the traditional postures of prayer confirmed in the Qur'an, but not the traditional number of units (*rak'at*). This is 'left to our discretion' (Yuksel 2009a).

Yuksel's work represents a new trend that has emerged among contemporary Qur'anists in the last several years, but one which proponents of Hadith see as the strongest argument for the necessity of accepting Prophetic reports – fear that people will do whatever they sit fit in implementing religious practices (Musa 2008, p. 121). This phenomenon is much more apparent on another Qur'anist website, <http://www.free-minds.org>.

<http://www.free-minds.org>

One of the most controversial of the Qur'an only websites is <http://www.free-minds.org>. This site emphasizes *God alone*, rather than *Qur'an alone*:

This website *invites* all people of various beliefs (Sunni, Shia, Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, Bahai, Agnostic, Humanist, and even Atheists) to come and examine for themselves the system of Submission/Islam which is based on *God Alone*. (Free-Minds.org 2009a)

However, they do recognize the Qur'an as their only reference in determining what it means to be 'Muslim.' The conclusions to which authors come are often radically different than many others who see themselves as followers of the *Qur'an alone*. The majority have redefined their idea of the role of the Messenger and the nature of divine revelation, based on specific Qur'anic verses, as the above discussion has detailed; and rejection of the Hadith has led them to make some changes in their religious practices, but in general, they have maintained what are popularly referred to as the Five Pillars: *shahada*, prayer, charity, fasting, and pilgrimage.

The authors of *Free-minds.org* reject the 'five pillars' of Islam as a 'myth' (al-Shaiban 2009a). Each of the traditional 'five pillars' is seen as corrupted by twisted and incorrect understanding of the Arabic terminology of the Qur'an. *Free-minds.org* contains provocative articles dealing with religious thought and practice in Islam. The views expressed on this site demonstrate some of the most extreme among those who reject the Hadith. Here we find arguments that traditional Muslim *shahada* is a blasphemous hypocrisy (Free-Minds.org 2009b), that *salat* is not ritual prayer (Hamed 2009), and that pilgrimage is not to Mecca, but to Jerusalem (al-Shaiban 2009b).

Ahmad Subhy Mansour and Ahl al-Quran

The website <http://www.ahl-alquran.com> is the official website of the Egyptian organization known as 'Ahl al-Quran: The International Quranic Center' (IQC). Although there is an English version, unlike most websites devoted to the idea of *Qur'an alone*, the primary version of this website is in Arabic. The IQC was founded by Dr Ahmad Subhy Mansour, an Egyptian with an extensive formal education in Islam and Muslim history.

He holds a Bachelor's, Master's and Doctorate in Muslim History from the University of al-Azhar and also served as a Professor of Muslim history there. He began to write and publicize his ideas in Egypt in the mid-1980s. In 1987, he was imprisoned. After his release, he moved to the United States, where he stayed briefly with Rashad Khalifa, in 1988. He broke with Khalifa and returned to Egypt some months later when Khalifa declared messengership.

Mansour continued his research and writing in Egypt, under the scrutiny of the State Security forces, before finally immigrating to the United States in 2001. He is grateful for the Internet: 'now with the Internet and freedom, the opportunity to publish my work on Ahl al-Qur'an website for free has arrived' (Mansour 2007b). Today, the website serves as the primary means of publishing his own works in Arabic and English, as well as articles by other Qur'anists. Ahl al-Quran also monitors worldwide media coverage of the current situation of Qur'anists in Egypt, publishing and discussing the coverage on the site. The material quoted here from <http://www.ahl-alquran.com> was accessed in 2007. When double checking citations for publication in August, 2009, the site was listed as 'unavailable now for maintenance.'

Ahl al-Quran stress the same themes found in the works of Khalifa, Ahmed, Yuksel, and other proponents of the concept of *Qur'an alone*: that the Qur'an is complete, comprehensive and sufficient as the sole source of law in Islam, as well as the only tradition (*sunna*) of the Prophet Muhammad (Ahl-alquran.com 2007). In contrast to the Qur'an, which they regard as the true *sunna* of Muhammad, they see many "so-called 'Hadeeth'" as not only demeaning and insulting to the Prophet, but also as tools used to 'entice and encourage terrorism' (Mansour 2007a).

The articles found on <http://www.ahl-alquran.com> address issues of belief and practices, offering alternative interpretations to what the authors see as problematic elements of more traditional interpretations, particularly in areas such as women's rights and freedom of speech and conscience. Like, <http://www.free-minds.org>, authors on <http://www.ahl-alquran.com> freely express their personal understandings of Qur'anic teachings. Each article carries the disclaimer that opinions are those of the author and may not reflect the opinions of the organization, or other members or participants. Some maintain the traditional forms of rituals and practices while removing elements they see as violating Qur'anic teachings and principles. Others differ dramatically from traditional understandings of such practices as prayer, fasting, and pilgrimage. If the fear that a book other than the Qur'an would distract and mislead people has been realized in the status accorded to the Hadith by most Muslims, fear that without the Prophetic Traditions people would do whatever they see fit in the name of religious practices has been realized in the variant opinions of the rejecters of Hadith. This is a challenge to traditional, mainstream Islam; but is it, as the former deputy rector of al-Azhar suggests, the greatest threat facing Islam? The comparison that some draw with the Protestant Reformation (Musa 2008, p. 107) offers something to consider because while the Reformation did lead to new denominations of Christianity, many of them quite different than the Catholic Church they challenged, the Church continued to thrive. Likewise, perhaps the *Qur'an alone* movements may lead to new branches of Islam, while the traditional branches and schools will continue to thrive as well.

Short Biography

Dr Aisha Y. Musa received her PhD in Arabic and Islamic Studies from the Department of Near Eastern Languages & Civilizations at Harvard University. She is currently an

assistant professor of Islamic Studies in the Religious Studies Department at Florida International University, in Miami. Dr Musa's training at Harvard focused on early Islamic scriptural history, specifically the relative authority of the Qur'an and Prophetic Traditions (Hadith). Her book, *Hadith as Scripture: Discussions on the Authority of Prophetic Traditions in Islam* (Palgrave, 2008), explores the development of the doctrine of duality of revelation and issues surrounding the relative authority of the Qur'an and the Prophetic Traditions (Hadith). Her research and teaching interests extend from the early classical period to the present and include translation of classical Arabic texts, Qur'anic interpretation, women's issues, and modern-day reformist and neo-traditionalist movements.

Note

* Correspondence address: Aisha Y. Musa, 11200 SW 8th St, DM 302, Miami, Florida 33199, USA. E-mail: amusa@fiu.edu.

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